MEMO

TO: Regional Comprehensive Plan Task Force

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DATE: March 28, 2005

SUBJECT: Water Element of the Regional Comprehensive Plan

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Provide input to staff regarding issues to be addressed in the Water Chapter of the Regional Comprehensive Plan, and report to the Energy and Environment Committee.

SUMMARY:

Clean and reliable water in the SCAG region is essential to the future quality of life in our growing region. The projected growth in population and jobs is certain to increase the water challenges the region will face in the coming years. These challenges include the creation of environmentally sustainable communities, the management of stormwater and urban runoff pollution, interagency collaboration and initiatives within shared watersheds, the development of new local water resources and infrastructure, the expansion of current water conservation programs, the on-going availability of imported supplemental water supplies, the increased use of water markets and transfers, the development of improved water treatment technologies and the increased coordination of policy and resources among all levels of government.

Regional policies have been adopted by the Regional Council to address these challenges. These range from the Council's consideration of significant regional water issues to adopted mitigation measures identified in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Reports of past Regional Transportation Plans. In general, these policies have focused on improving regional environmental quality and best management practices, cost-effective watershed pollution controls and reliable water supplies for growing urban communities. These themes will be developed in the coming draft of the Water Chapter in the Regional Comprehensive Plan.

BACKGROUND:

These water policy and issue themes will include the following kinds of discussion:

The creation of environmentally sustainable communities: Water quality and water supply are influenced by the design elements used in planning and creating new communities. Compact development designs that reduce impervious surfaces and increase natural areas not only allow for natural runoff purification treatment, but also save stormwater for groundwater infiltration.

The management of stormwater and urban runoff pollution: Water quality regulators are issuing increasingly stringent rules to reduce local stormwater and urban runoff pollution. These regulations apply to individual jurisdictions and, by various studies, are expected to be very costly mandates for local agencies in the SCAG region. Based on SCAG's historic interest in "areawide waste treatment management planning", regional policy emphasizes the need for watershed-scale planning (a new way of describing "areawide planning") and implementation of pollution control measures. This scale of environmental management is expected to bring needed improvements on a much more cost-effective basis that from individual projects in each local jurisdiction. This same approach offers Caltrans and other regional transportation agencies new ways to reduce their runoff management costs.

Interagency collaboration and initiatives within shared watersheds: Water supplies needed for future growth in the region depend on infrastructure and resource collaboration within each of the watersheds of the region. Too often the agencies that manage water supplies have restricted their planning and activities to only their own service areas, limiting their ability to plan more comprehensively. The same concerns apply to the need for collaboration among agencies impacted by water quality regulations within a watershed.

The development of new local water resources and infrastructure: Because of recent state legislation, the region's future growth is now linked with water supplies. This growth, both infill and otherwise, will place new strains on the current water infrastructure. In some cases it will require retrofitting and replacing old systems; in others it will require extending systems to serve new customers. This infrastructure challenge ranges from system plumbing to water management practices and flexibility.

The expansion of current water conservation programs: Water conservation is an indispensable element in the ability of our growing region to achieve needed water reliability. There is a consumption parallel between agricultural water use in the state and in residential landscape irrigation: agriculture consumes about 80 percent of the state's water supply and residential landscape irrigation consumes about 80 percent of the household water supply. New irrigation practices and technology can reduce this outside use, along with changes in plant selection that work well with native, drought-tolerant conditions. Installation of water-saving devices and appliances in new and existing residences is another important conservation opportunity.

The on-going availability of imported supplemental water supplies: Imported water supplies are increasingly constrained by competing claims and environmental considerations. These concerns raise the importance of the CalFed Bay-Delta Program, the water supply impacts from habitat and other ecological activities throughout the state and other complex management and planning issues related to the Colorado River.

The increased use of water markets and transfers: The development of markets for the transfer of water between different basins is an important factor for improving the region's water reliability and for improving water quality in the region's water supplies. The ability of water agencies in the region to acquire surplus water from other areas encourages the development of more ambitious groundwater storage programs and makes possible the advantages of conjunctive water use.

The development of improved water treatment technologies: Current water treatment technologies are chemical and energy-intensive. Along with pollution source controls and natural treatment systems,

new technological development needs to be encouraged that reduces the heavy reliance on these factors and minimizes by-products that impair the resulting water supplies. New treatment breakthroughs can also contribute to needed increases in water reclamation and reuse throughout the region, especially in the management and use of groundwater basins.

The increased coordination of policy and resources among all levels of government: With a flexible water policy and resources infrastructure, comprehensive watershed-scale solutions and creative regional governance, water supply and water quality challenges can be met. Cost considerations are always important in meeting these challenges, but policy and program coordination can forge influential coalitions, reduce costs and improve the potentials for success.

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